

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

221223Z Oct 03

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 006613

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/22/2013

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: BAYKAL SET TO BE RE-ELECTED OPPOSITION CHP
CHAIRMAN

REF: ANKARA 5001

(U) Classified by Political Counselor John Kunstadter.
Reason: 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) Summary: With party delegates firmly in his grasp, CHP leader Baykal is likely to be re-elected chairman at an Oct. 23-24 general convention. Although our contacts expect a contentious atmosphere, they do not expect major changes to the CHP administration. Former state minister Kemal Dervis has been more vocal about having a greater say in party matters, but our contacts suggest he has little support within the party itself. While he may get a seat on the central committee, Dervis is not likely to be given much room for maneuver. End summary.

2. (C) Main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) will hold its general convention Oct. 23-24, two days earlier than originally planned. Our CHP contacts tell us that party chairman Deniz Baykal moved the dates of the convention so that he will be able to attend a socialist parties' conference in Brazil, where Baykal will be a presenter.

Sound and Fury...

3. (C) CHP M.P.s across the board acknowledge that the convention will be contentious because of the party's flagging polling numbers, which have consistently shown public support for the party at around 12 percent. CHP Vice Chairman Sinan Yerlikaya -- a close Baykal advisor -- told us Oct. 17 that he expects a lively open debate on the direction of the party. In a meeting with us Oct. 21, senior CHP M.P. Fuat Cay echoed Yerlikaya, admitting that there are many dissatisfied long-time party officials from the local level, who want Baykal to take an even harder public line against the ruling AK Party. Cay said any party member will be allowed to speak his mind during the convention's first day. "This is why we are more democratic than other parties," he averred with a straight face.

4. (C) Much of the expected cacophony centers around rivalries among Baykal cronies and between the party leadership and the grassroots. Cay said there is growing opposition to a few senior figures in the party -- Vice Chairman Mehmet Sevigen and M.P. Bulent Tanla among them -- who are perceived as being close to Baykal but not to the party grassroots. Moreover, CHP member and former State Minister Erol Cevikce -- who was once very close to Baykal -- told us Oct. 20 that CHP Secretary General Onder Sav is leading a campaign to oust Esref Erdem, who is considered by many CHP insiders as Baykal's most trusted advisor, from his position as party Vice Chairman. Cevikce claimed Sav is trying to set himself up as a potential successor to Baykal should the party do poorly in the local elections, now scheduled for March 28, 2004.

5. (C) A bigger concern for the CHP leadership, according to our contacts, is the potential flare-up over how the party will elect its assembly, which chooses the members of the central committee that, in turn, sets party policy. Cay explained that the delegates will vote on whether to use a "block list" of assembly candidates or a "blanket list." Baykal favors a block list, because it allows him to choose exactly whom he wants in the party assembly. In a block list, delegates have no choice but to except the party leadership's recommendations. Perhaps as a first step in billing himself as Baykal's successor, Sav openly opposes the block list and favors the blanket list, which is a longer list of assembly candidates, giving delegates the flexibility to pick and choose their favorites. Cay, himself a Baykal lackey, admitted that if the delegates oppose the block list, the current CHP central committee will issue a "key" to the

blanket list, indicating which candidates the party leadership prefers -- in effect undermining the more democratic approach of the blanket list.

...Signifying Nothing?

16. (C) Despite the potential for a divisive convention, few of our CHP contacts expect major changes to the senior party leadership and none foresee -- at least for now -- a real challenge to Baykal. According to our contacts, the three other candidates for chairman -- Erol Tuncer, Cemal Ozdemir, and Bedri Baykam -- lack any base of support within the party. Our contacts point out that even a strong, charismatic candidate would have a difficult time challenging Baykal, because he controls most of the delegates. CHP M.P. Necdet Budak -- a frequent critic of Baykal in meetings with us -- explained to us Oct. 8 that the CHP leader had ensured a victory by reaching down to the sub-provincial level to install his supporters. Sub-provincial officials elect provincial delegates, who in turn choose delegates to the general convention. Budak said he expects some changes to the party administration but nothing significant. "But you never know," he added without much conviction.

Does Dervis Have a Chance?

17. (C) Former State Minister and CHP M.P. Kemal Dervis has been making more noise about having a larger role in determining the direction of the party. In a private meeting with us Oct. 21, Dervis explained that he hopes to secure a spot on the CHP central committee and bring with him an unspecified number of like-minded M.P.s. (note: Dervis has publicly and privately called for the transformation of CHP into a more European-style social democratic party (reftel). end note). Dervis told us that he has no plans to challenge Baykal directly for the leadership of the party, claiming he has too many personal constraints. He reiterated his recent comments in the press that he disagrees with Baykal on a host of issues but backed away from saying he will leave the party if he does not get what he wants at the convention. He denied persistent rumors that he is considering joining AK if Baykal does not allow him a more high-profile role but admitted, when pressed, that he does not know what he will do in that event.

18. (C) Most of our contacts in the party are dismissive of Dervis' chances at the convention. They admit that there is a public expectation that Dervis will become more influential -- an expectation that could land Dervis a spot on the central committee -- but say he has little support within the party itself. In fact, according to Cevikce, many blame Dervis for the party's perceived electoral failure last November. Cevikce said that Onur Oymen -- who is close to Baykal and who has spewed the most anti-American rhetoric of any of the CHP M.P.s -- has more support within the party than Dervis. Yerlikaya added that he hopes Dervis leaves the party after the convention. He is divisive, Yerlikaya said, noting that Dervis joined CHP, not the other way around.

Comment: What's Next?

19. (C) Baykal is set to hang on to the CHP chairmanship. Although a few new faces may enter the party's central committee, any significant change to CHP policies is unlikely -- even if Dervis does win a seat on the committee. CHP insiders tell us Baykal -- firmly in control of the party machine -- does not yet feel enough pressure to alter CHP's course. Indeed, most of the edginess surrounding the upcoming convention springs more from personal rivalry than any dissatisfaction with the party's policies. However, our contacts tell us that the true test for Baykal and CHP will be local elections in March. Most speculate that if CHP does poorly -- which they define as receiving less than the 19 percent of the vote the party received last November -- then the exasperated grassroots are likely to push for an extraordinary party congress to elect a new chairman. Cevikce argued that Baykal is already maneuvering to head off such an outcome. Baykal, he said, is bringing delegates to the convention who are likely to win spots as mayors or on municipal councils after the March local elections. In this way, Baykal is attempting to create a cadre of delegates who are indebted to him and would, therefore, protect him should the party fall further.

